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**Task Force Works Hard to Improve Emergency Care for Stroke and Heart Attack Victims**

By **Steve Walsh**

Members of the state's Time Critical Diagnosis Task Force are moving forward with their effort to develop recommendations for a statewide emergency response system for victims of stroke and heart attack.

Doctor Bill Jermyn with the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services is closely watching the progress of House (HB 1790) and Senate (SB 1233) bills designed to ensure that patients suffering from these medical conditions are delivered to hospitals where the right treatment can be received within an appropriate timeframe. Doctor Jermyn says the first step is for the patient to call 911 to activate the system. Following that, the patient's needs would first be handled at a local hospital, with the person then taken to where a better equipped hospital - if needed - where he or she would receive additional treatment.

Doctor Jermyn says ischemic strokes - the most common form of strokes in Missouri - are caused by a disruption or blockage of blood supply in the brain. It is recommended that treatment be received within three hours of the onset of such strokes, but researchers estimate less than two percent of patients who suffer from this common form of stroke receive the appropriate therapy in a time-sensitive manner.

The task force says time is lost and patients suffer as a result of inconsistent protocols for assessment and transport, and fragmentation of stroke-related care by inadequate integration of facilities.